Ensuring Equity in English Education:
Language Teaching Approaches and Methods for Individual Differences

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This study explores how prospective English teachers who have learned English teaching and methods catering for individual student differences view individual differences in the whole-class teaching situation. A total of 34 prospective teachers participated in this study. We analyzed their reflections and essays using applied thematic analysis（Guest et al., 2012）. The results indicate that the prospective teachers decided to employ various materials or tasks according to learner differences. However, they recognized individual differences as falling into two or three groups（e.g., likes or dislikes, and levels of achievement）. Because teaching approaches and methods interact with learner differences, to help prospective teachers better understand both teaching approaches/methods and learners, teacher education should teach individual difference factors as part of the initial English teacher education.

　平成28年度に開講された『英語科教育法概論Ⅱ』において，34人の受講生に対し，学習者要因について留意しながら英語教授法を指導し，それを通じて英語科教職履修生はどのようにして学習者要因に関する認識を持つのかを探求した。受講生が授業について振り返った記述をデータとして用い，その分析方法としてapplied thematic analysis（Guest et al., 2012）を採択した。その結果，受講生は学習者要因を考慮し，タスクまたは教材を工夫することや段階的な指導を意識するようになった。しかし一方で，英語の得意・不得意などといった表面的で大まかな区分をし，個々の学習者にそれぞれ異なった学習者要因が存在するという認識までには至らなかった。したがって，英語教授法と学習者要因が授業設計において有機的に相互作用する関係であるために，教員養成を担当する教員は，学習者要因を扱う機会をより多く設定する必要がある。

Keywords：English Teaching Approaches and Methods（英語教授法）　Individual Differences（学習者要因）
　　　　　　Teacher Education（教員養成）

1. Backgrounds

1. 1. English teaching approaches and methods

　How to teach English is the central theme for English teachers because their choice of teaching approaches and methods shapes the lessons they conduct and organizes how learners learn English in classroom settings. It is unclear whether the term *method* refers to techniques and teaching activities, theoretical approaches, or a particular method（e.g., the Oral Method）.

　According to Richards and Rodgers（2014）, *method* is constituted of the three elements of *approach, design*, and *procedures*. Theoretical *approach* refers to "theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practice and principles in language teaching"（p. 22）. *Design* refers to an instructional system, including the objectives of a method, a syllabus model, the learner role, the teacher role, and the role of materials. Design leads a theoretical approach to a method. *Procedure* is "the

level at which we describe how a method realizes its theoretical approach and design in classroom behavior"（p. 35）. It includes classroom practices, techniques, and behaviors observed when the method is used. In this way, teaching method can be described at the levels of approach, design, and procedure.

　In applied linguistics, research on teaching approaches and methods has played a central role since the 1920s, and various attempts have been made to conceptualize the nature of approaches and methods and have tried to bridge the gap between theory and practice within these. Paradigm shift is one of the central factors responsible for the rise and fall of methods. When a paradigm shift takes place, objectives are seen from different perspectives and focus on different aspects of pedagogic phenomena. Hence, language teaching is based on linguistic theories, psychology, and second language acquisition. Therefore, teaching methods and approaches are strongly influenced by paradigm shifts in those fields. According to Jacobs and Farrell（2001）, the following paradigm shift took place in second language acquisition:

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The principal paradigm shift […] flowed from the positivism to post-positivism shift and involved a move away from the tenets of behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics and toward cognitive, and later, socio-cognitive psychology and more contextualized, meaning-based views of language. (p. 2)

In addition, they identified the ten key components of this paradigm shift. One of them concerns "focusing greater attention on diversity among learners and viewing these differences not as impediments to learning but as resources to be organized, centered to and appreciated" (p. 3). This shift is the study of individual differences, and it has an impact on teaching method. Hence, teachers seek to teach English while giving deep consideration to individual differences at the levels of approach, design, and procedure.

A considerable number of language teaching approaches and methods have been developed following paradigm shifts, and teachers have multiple choices in the way they teach. However, as professional language teachers, they should be aware that it is insufficient to follow any single teaching method treated as a recipe. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) pointed out that a teaching method is decontextualized:

How a method is implemented in the classroom is not only going to be affected by who the teacher is, but also by who the students are, what they and the teacher expect as appropriate social roles, the institutional constraints and demands, and factors connected to the wider sociocultural context in which the instruction takes place. (p. xiii)

Hence, in planning lessons, teachers need to consider classroom contexts and the needs of the individual learners who create the contexts, while simultaneously seeking the best approaches or methods. Any method is shaped by a teacher's understanding, beliefs, style, and level of experience. However, as Richards and Rodgers (2014) concluded, "learners' contributions to language learning should not be constrained by the practices of a particular teaching approach or method" (p. 341). They insist that teachers need to have a keen eye for learner autonomy, learning strategies, and learning styles in order to understand learners in the classroom. It is not methods, but how they are used according to the classroom context that is of importance.

1. 2. Individual differences in English education

Learners of a second or foreign language vary not only in their speed of acquisition but also in their level of achievement. Various characteristics or traits make individuals distinct from each other.

Individual differences seem to be easy to define: These are anything that make an individual distinct and unique. Since this definition is very broad, some restrictions need to be imposed. Dörnyei (2005) defined individual differences as "dimensions of enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree" (p. 4) and regarded individual differences as demonstrating stability or continuity. However, as Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) pointed out, learner characteristics are not stable but are temporal or situational. In sum, individual differences can be applied to everyone and differ between people. Individual differences in second or foreign language learning comprise factors that include language aptitudes, intelligence, personality, motivation, learning strategies, anxiety, working memory, willingness to communicate, self-esteem, and learner beliefs (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan 2015; Robinson, 2002; Skehan, 1989).

Horwitz (2000) reviewed articles in the *Modern Language Journal* and summarized how language teachers' views of foreign language learners have changed since the 1910s. According to her estimate, the real revolution in recognition of student types began in the 1970s. In the *Modern Language Journal* of the 1970s–1990s, Horwitz (2000) found a drastic change in the labels used for describing foreign language learners: "The terms *good* and *bad*, *intelligent* and *dull*, *motivated* and *unmotivated* have given away almost entirely to a myriad of new terms such as *integratively* and *instrumentally motivated*, *anxious* and *comfortable*, *field independent* and *field sensitive*, *auditory* and *visual*" (p. 532, italics in original). Researchers in foreign language learning no longer divide learners into two extreme opposite groups such as good or bad, but categorize them into various subgroups.

In the past, the main purpose of individual difference research was to determine which learners would succeed. Recent studies of individual differences focus on why some learners succeed more than others so as to determine appropriate teaching approaches (Ellis, 2004). For instance, learning styles often relate to ways of teaching; research has demonstrated that when students' learning styles and teachers' teaching styles match, students learn better (e.g., Ellis, 1989; Reid, 1998). Richards and Rodgers (2014) proposed another individual learner factor, Multiple Intelligences, and maintained that teachers should respond to a student's uniqueness. Although the clear connection between multiple intelligences and language learning was not fully evaluated, Richards and Rodgers (2014) stated that teachers are expected to understand multiple

intelligences and orchestrate multisensory activities.

1. 3. Learner diversity and English teaching approaches and methods

As noted above, it is now widely accepted that every teacher should understand their students' diversity. In Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2015) gave examples of the students diversity to be found in mainstream schools: those with developmental disorders, those from other countries, and those who need language support. MEXT (2012) found that approximately 6.5 percent of students had some kind of learning or behavioral difficulties and considered these as having suspected developmental disorders. The new *Course of Study* (MEXT, 2017) gives explanations of curricula in resource rooms and special needs education classrooms and activities for social independence. All teachers are required to understand these curricula to provide adequate support by considering children's development. It summarizes the student diversity to be considered; for example, students with disorders, returnees, students who need Japanese language support, and students who do not attend schools (MEXT, 2017, p. 9–11). The message is that students in mainstream classrooms demonstrate diverse educational needs, and every teacher should deal with them.

In Australia, where students' diversity includes students with disabilities, immigrants, students with multiple cultural backgrounds, and multiple ethnicities, Hyde, Carpenter, and Conway (2010) argued for the importance of understanding equity in education. They consider the term *equity* as not only equal opportunity or equal access to education but also equal learning outcomes. The provision of reasonable accommodation plays a crucial role in ensuring equal outcomes of all students' learning. In the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the denial of reasonable accommodation—which in an educational context includes denial of modification of the school environment and provision of individual support—is considered to be discrimination. The Convention states that:

> Discrimination on the basis of disability means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation (Article 2)

In the school environment, for instance, we need to prepare rooms for students with disabilities to cool down and provide written instructions with oral instructions or digital materials to learn individually (see MEXT's website for more examples; http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/044/attach/1297377.htm). The Convention aims to ensure equal participation for students with disabilities; however, we can adapt this concept to students who have difficulty learning in mainstream classrooms. As declared in the Convention, every teacher must provide these accommodations for students with disabilities. However, Hoshika (2015, August) found that teachers in mainstream schools did not consider themselves to be sufficiently equipped with the knowledge and skills to provide adequate support to students with difficulties Moreover, in initial English teacher education, few universities provide opportunities to learn English teaching approaches and methods that address students' diversities (Hoshika, 2015, October). Every English teacher should understand individual differences and seek the best teaching approaches or methods for each of their students.

2. Method

2. 1. Qualitative research

In the field of English teacher education, there are sparse studies of teachers' ability to deal with diverse students, particularly those with special educational needs. This led us to conduct qualitative research focusing on interpreting and understanding prospective teachers' feelings about teaching English to diverse students. Our experience often affects our views of disorders or people with difficulties (Taguchi et al., 2012). Hence, in understanding the opinions and comments of the participants in this study concerning diverse students, including those with communicational or behavioral difficulties, we cannot ignore the surrounding context and the students' experiences. Our qualitative approach allowed us to interpret participants' opinions in a bottom-up way and thus construct a series of possible modifications to teaching approaches and methods, as discussed by the participants in this study.

Since qualitative researches are often interpretive, many qualitative researchers are likely to consider the trustworthiness of a research study. Some strategies to establish trustworthiness are:

> [...] prolonged engagement; persistent observation; triangulation or use of multiple methods, sites, and/or respondents; negative case analysis; checking with peers and supervisors, member

checking on collected data and on interpretations; thick description; monitoring of subjectivity; and data and theory audit trails (Glesne, 2016, p. 152).

As a means of triangulation, in addition to multiple methods of data collection, Glesne (2016) noted that "triangulation also refers to the incorporation of multiple kinds of data sources (e.g., not just teachers, but also students and parents as well), multiple investigators, and multiple theoretical perspectives" (p. 45). Therefore, as means of triangulation, we employed multiple methods of data collection and checking analyzed data among researchers.

In contrast to the predictive and generalizable tendencies of quantitative researches, "some qualitative researchers do consider the extent to which their findings may be generalizable, but many leave it up to the readers to decide to what degree the features of the research setting are relevant to their own context" (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 9). This is called transferability (Glesne, 2016). It was not the aim of this study to seek out definitive understandings or objective truths; consequently, we leave readers to decide whether to transfer the findings of this study to their own situations. While the findings do not claim to represent absolute truths, nonetheless, to a greater or lesser degree, they will be true for other prospective English teachers.

In the qualitative approach, "*the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis*" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16, italics in original). That is, the researchers' worldview or experiences can affect their understandings of the meanings of the participants' experiences. In this sense, we cannot separate the researcher's worldview or experiences from the procedure of data collection, data analyses, and interpretation. Berger (2015) argued that "reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's responsibility as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (p. 220). In this study, we served as researchers and (assistant) instructors, which may have affected our relationship with the participants and our interpretation of their thoughts. Throughout the research period, the first author (HM) recorded her internal dialogues and reflections on her research process in research notes, particularly when she realized that her experience of teaching English to students with special needs strongly influenced the data analysis. HM introduced herself as a PhD candidate who was researching ways to teach English to students with special needs; however, during this study, she did not accentuate students with special

needs as having individual differences. Rather, she discussed various factors contributing to learner differences to avoid forcing her opinion on the participants.

2. 2. Research question

We gave instructions on teaching methods that take into account the individual differences of learners and conducted this study in the *Introduction to English teaching methods II* course of the 2016 academic year. The main purpose of this study was to explore how prospective English teachers who are studying English teaching approaches and methods learn the individual differences of English learners. The research questions of this study were:

1. How do prospective English teachers view individual differences in the whole-class teaching situation after completing a course on English teaching methods and individual differences?
2. After the course, how do they react to students' differences in mainstream English classes?

2. 3. Participants

The participants of this research were 34 university students who were acquiring the English teacher's license (see Table 1 for detail). All of them took the *introduction to the English teaching methods II* at a national university in the academic year of 2016.

Only two participants finished their practicum. The class took a total of 15 hours and was a prerequisite for the award of an English teacher's license. The purpose and contents of this class were: (1) to understand the purpose of English education and discuss the goals stated in the *Course of Study*, (2) to examine English teaching methods to foster English communicative competence as "zest for living", and (3) to prepare for the practicum and making teaching plans. The class instructor often asked the

Table 1 *Study Participants*

Faculty	Division	*n*
Education	Educational psychology (ES)	2
	Educational psychology (JHS)	1
	Educational science (ES)	2
	Educational science (JHS)	1
	English (ES)	9
	English (JHS)	10
	Home economics (JHS)	2
	P.E. (JHS)	1
	Science (JHS)	1
Literature	International cultures and languages	4
Credited auditor		1
Total		34

Note. ES=elementary school; JHS=junior high school

students to participate in group discussions and make short presentations. Prior to this research study, the English textbooks used in junior high schools had been examined by participants in groups of five or six comprising students with various majors. They then made presentations on their examination of their assigned textbooks. As the instructor and teaching assistants, we assumed that most of the participants preferred learning by doing. We included activities such as English songs with sign language, telephone games, and quizzes.

2. 4. Procedure

The class procedure is summarized in Table 2. This study was conducted from December 14, 2016 to January 25, 2017. Before learning about English teaching approaches and methods, the participants briefly learned about individual differences, particularly in vocabulary learning strategies and learning styles. We chose these factors because the participants were already familiar with them and they were easier to connect with teaching approaches or methods than other learner factors. Since the participants seemed to prefer learning by doing, we provided vocabulary learning activities and a learning style preferences survey to raise their interest in the topic. After that, they discussed how to resolve a hypothetical case (a description of an English class in which one student had communicational difficulty) to facilitate their understanding of learner differences in a classroom. Then the participants were divided into six groups and each group was assigned to give a 25-minute presentation. For the presentation topics, we selected the Oral Method, Oral Approach, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Natural Approach, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The participants were given handouts on all teaching methods (Sasajima, 2011; Tazaki, 1995) prior to the class and asked to read them beforehand. They were required to learn the characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of each method. After each presentation, the instructor gave additional information and showed

a video of an English class using the teaching method.

For their homework, after each class they summarized the advantages and disadvantages of each method, giving consideration to learner differences. They also modified each teaching method for the class described in the hypothetical case.

2. 5. Data collection methods

The data was collected using more three methods to ensure triangulation. We employed the following methods: (1) notes of group discussion of the hypothetical case, (2) learning journals, and (3) the final assignment.

During the group discussion of the hypothetical case (see Appendix), one participant in each group took notes of their comments. The hypothetical case was about a student who was struggling in English communication activities but good at English listening. The English teacher was worried about the student's loss of confidence in learning English.

The participants wrote learning journals after each class. The learning journal included two questions for each teaching method or approach: (1) What are advantages and disadvantages of each teaching method, considering learner differences? and (2) What would you modify when you use each teaching method in the hypothetical class?

The hypothetical case was printed on the reverse side of the learning journal in case they forgot the situation and could not answer the second question. Some students did not hand in the journals; therefore, the number of journals varied for each method or approach.

The final assignment was given to the participants in the last class. This assignment was to discuss the "individual differences in the whole-class instruction" and was due on February 24, 2017. The learning journals they had already handed in were returned to them with a summary of good comments selected from their journals for their reference. The length of the assignment was approximately 2,000 Japanese characters using computer software. The participants were able to hand in the assignment directly to the instructor or send it via email.

Table 2 *The Study Procedure*

Date	Contents of the Class	Assignment	N
Dec 14, 2016	Introduction of Teaching Methods Individual Differences Group Discussion (Fiction Case)	–	–
Dec 21, 2016	Oral Method Oral Approach	Journal (Oral method) Journal (Oral approach)	30 30
Jan 11, 2017	CLT	Journal (CLT)	30
Jan 18, 2017	Natural Approach TBLT	Journal (Natural approach) –	31 –
Jan 25, 2017	TBLT (continued) CLIL	Journal (TBLT) Journal (CLIL)	32 32
Feb 24, 2017	–	"Discussion on individual differences in the whole-class instruction"	33

Table 3 *Collected Data and Analysis Methods*

Types of data	Contained information	Data analysis
Discussion of the fiction case	· Discussion notes	Supplementary used
Learning journal	· Advantages and disadvantages of each method considering individual differences	Supplementary used
	· Modification of teaching methods	Analyzed using the applied thematic analysis
Final assignment (essays)	· Discussion on individual differences in the whole-class instruction	Analyzed using the applied thematic analysis

2. 6. Data analysis

Table 3 shows all data collected during the English teaching method class and how we analyzed each of them. We used applied thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) to analyze learning journals and final assignments. The applied thematic analysis can be "used to build theoretical models or to find solutions to real-world problems" (Guest et al., 2012, p. 17). The primary goal of applied thematic analysis is "to describe and understand how people feel, think, and behave within a particular context relative to a specific research question" (Guest et al., 2012, p. 13). To enhance trustworthiness, we developed a codebook for use during the analysis. Two researchers (HM and TT) first analyzed the data, and the third author (HK) checked their analysis, which serves as triangulation.

Since the participants were to discuss individual differences in whole-class instruction, we focused on how they recognized student differences and how they reacted to diverse students in mainstream English classes. We excluded one essay of less than 1,400 Japanese characters in length (less than 70% of the required length) from the analysis; we thus analyzed 33 essays in total. We segmented the essays by paragraph, each of which was supposed to include different opinions or thoughts. After segmentation, we coded for contents. We combined all essays into one Word file without the participants' names to avoid biased reading. We read through all essays again and again, and codes and then themes emerged.

3. Results

From the final assignments, three themes and 25 subthemes emerged from 255 segments. Considering the purpose of this study was to understand the participants' view of individual differences in the whole-class teaching situation, the third theme was allocated to miscellaneous statements that were not considered to answer the questions or included irrelevant or superfluous details. These included statements about the teaching methods themselves, the hypothetical case we used in the class, and specific situations with over-detailed descriptions as seen in the excerpt below:

> Student D is half Japanese and half Chinese. She lived in China until her sixth grade and came to my school when she was in the third year of her junior high school. Her first language is Chinese. She can have daily conversations in English and Japanese.

3. 1. The participants' view of individual differences

Table 4 presents the themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis. Theme 1 considered the breadth of the participants' view of individual differences. Figure 1 is a visual representation of Theme 1. As indicated by the arrow beside the boxes, the views of individuals become broader from top to the bottom.

Table 4 *Themes that Emerged from the Final Assignments*

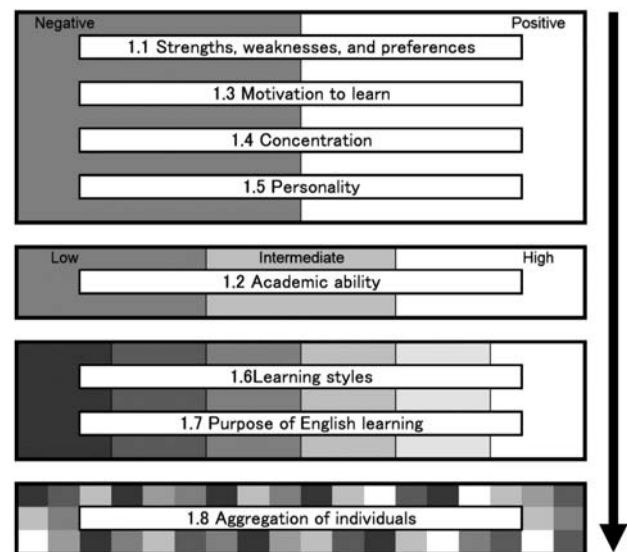| Themes/Subthemes |
| --- |
| Theme 1 Individual differences in mainstream classes |
| 1. 1 Strengths, weaknesses, and preferences |
| 1. 2 Academic ability |
| 1. 3 Motivation to learn |
| 1. 4 Concentration |
| 1. 5 Personality |
| 1. 6 Learning styles |
| 1. 7 Purposes of English learning |
| 1. 8 Aggregation of individuals |
| Theme 2 Modification |
| 2. 1 Adopting various teaching methods |
| 2. 2 Preparation of various tasks |
| 2. 3 Adopting collaborative learning |
| 2. 4 Understanding students |
| 2. 5 Decreasing the level of students' anxiety |
| 2. 6 Dividing tasks into small steps |
| 2. 7 Considering students' interests |
| 2. 8 Considering both individuals and whole class |
| 2. 9 Focusing on majority or average level |
| 2. 10 Avoiding demotivating students |
| 2. 11 Reflecting on classes |
| 2. 12 Providing individual supports |
| 2. 13 Not giving special treatment |
| 2. 14 Deciding students' partners |
| 2. 15 Checking students' understanding |
| 2. 16 Modifying elicitation questions |
| 2. 17 Considering students with high academic ability |
| 2. 18 Setting clear goals |
| Theme 3 N/A |
| **Total** |

Figure 1 The breadth of the participants' view of individual differences.

Subthemes 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5 show that the participants simply divided students into two groups (e.g., those who are good/bad at English; those who are introvert/extrovert; those who are motivated/not motivated). In Subtheme 1.2, they divided students into three groups: those with high, intermediate, and low level of achievements:

> […] The teaching methods we learned in this class focused on average students, but not on students who are good/bad at English…. In this essay, I will discuss consideration of individual differences by dividing students into "those who are good at English," "average students," and "those who are bad at English". (V#153)

The rest of the subthemes demonstrate that they divided students into larger number of groups than in subthemes 1.1–1.4.

From theme 1, we found two interpretations of their views of individual differences in mainstream classes. First, we can assume that the prospective teachers considered the class to consist of two or three subgroups. As we will see in the next section, the main topic of their writings appeared to concern deciding which teaching method they would like to adopt in their future classes. It is very natural that we look for patterns of students when we decide which teaching method to employ. For instance, the participants divided students in a classroom into two groups according to the students' likes/dislikes, or three groups according to their academic ability. However, some subthemes took into account the variety among students based on their concentration, learning styles, and purpose for learning English.

Second, the participants tended to focus on the outcomes of students' learning. As shown in Table 4, most of them mentioned students' strengths/weaknesses or likes/dislikes. In their final report, they often used (in Japanese) *dekiru/dekinai*, which can be interpreted as *can/cannot do something* or *good/bad at something*. For instance, the following excerpt shows that the participant considered the individual difference factor as one of being good/bad at English learning:

> When we teach one class as a whole, there are students in the same classroom who are good or bad at English, or who like/dislike English. (V#5)

Some participants did mention how students communicate with other students; however, they used the words *dekiru/dekinai* as well.

> […] In doing tasks, some students prefer active

ways to learn or communicate with others. Other students are not so good at communicating. Naturally, their conversation takes the form of being talked to by the active students….. (V#77)

Apart from this view, no one mentioned the process of learning English, for instance, how students interact with other students, materials, or tasks.

From these findings, the participants who had not yet finished their practicum had difficulty clearly imagining classroom situations or junior high or high school students. They might have had some vision of English classes and students, but these may reflect their standpoint as students rather than prospective teachers.

3.2. Modification or reaction to individual differences

As noted above, the participants tended to divide the class into two or three groups. By doing this, they could deal with a class of diverse students. They tended to group students according to patterns in their characteristics and then look for ways of addressing these different groups, as seen in the following excerpts:

> […] The first thing that we should think about is "what methods we can employ for these kinds of students." We can assume that some methods might be counter-productive or ineffective for some students. However, by patterning we can deal with different students by making small modifications to our teaching method. Therefore, it is important to find typical patterns of student problems. I will now discuss some of these patterns. (V#79)

Although the topic of the assignment was recognizing and acknowledging differences between individuals in mainstream classes, some participants took teaching method rather than individual difference as their starting point. They tended to discuss how they would apply the teaching methods they had learnt in class, thus misunderstanding the question. Aside from this, two tendencies emerged from the assignments.

First, the participants suggested some long-term support ideas; they mentioned taking small steps toward overcoming larger difficulties and reducing students' anxiety, as the following excerpt shows:

> Introverts are not good at communicative activities. Therefore, we should start by communicating with them alone before moving to pair work or role-playing that require students to talk a lot. After they get used to interaction with

teachers, we can use pair work to increase the amount of each student's talk.... （V#99）

Most of the participants mentioned ways to encourage students with communication difficulties to participate in communicative activities, and this was influenced by the hypothetical case used during the class. They had ideas about dividing activities that some students find difficult into smaller and easier parts. However, reducing the number of people that these students talk to means modifying the class surroundings, and this is difficult. The participants tended to have flexible ideas and wider views that might be idealistic to the teachers in service. They seemed to overlook time limitations when they thought about the support ideas. For instance, collaborative learning, which one participant mentioned in the excerpt below, requires a lot of preparation time:

> And, we need not necessarily stick to the idea that teachers teach classes. For example, we can ask students who have a good understanding to teach other students in small groups. In this way, they can foster better understanding in class by teaching their classmates.... （V#95）

Second, the participants recognized individual differences and realized that they cannot afford to employ only one material or task for all students; therefore, they decided to adopt several materials or tasks （subtheme 2.2）.

> Moreover, although teachers make all students do the same task during the whole class, learners whose level is higher than average cannot improve and those at lower levels can be left behind. That is, it is desirable for students to have some time to learn according to their individual levels, or to use different materials based on their levels. （V#190）

Finally, we should discuss the most important but difficult issue: Is the provision of support to students with difficulty spoiling them? Theme 1.13 （Not giving special treatment） raised this question. In their learning journals, one participant mentioned that he/she would not like to treat students with difficulty as special exceptions:

> Second, we should not provide too much support to students who have difficulty in something by saying that they don't have to do it. As I mentioned above, we should treat all students equally; therefore, we should not give special treatment a student by saying, "You are not good at this activity, so you do not have to participate

in it." （V#23）

The participant seemed to understand the phrase "to treat students equally" to mean "to give students the same materials, same activities and same assignments." If some students do not participate in some activities, the students are not all doing the same thing, which means that the teacher is not treating the students equally. If teachers allow some students to do different activities, they have the responsibility of explaining to other students why they are doing different things. They should often explain the same thing to their students' families as well. They might be avoiding accountability because they have no idea how to explain it. They might really think that all students should do the same things.

4. Discussion

In this study, we examined prospective English teachers' views of individual differences while they were learning teaching approaches or methods for English, and we explored how they reacted to individual differences. The four main points of the findings can now be summarized.

First, the prospective teachers were aware of students' individual differences and decided to employ various tasks or materials in the classroom. Some of them mentioned that there is no best method for all students. Although they used individual differences to define two or three subgroups of students, they attempted to employ various activities that can be helpful for different groups of students. In most cases, the prospective teachers proposed preparing two or three different resources suitable for each group of students. For instance, they mentioned different levels of materials for students with high, intermediate, and low achievement. We noted that the prospective teachers seemed to see the hypothetical case from their own perspectives as students, and struggled to visualize the situation described in the hypothetical case. It might be difficult for the prospective teachers in the second year of their teacher education to learn individual differences. However, as some participants saw the individual differences between students in mainstream classrooms as comprising clusters of factors, learning teaching methods or approaches that take account of individual differences can help to make them aware of the diversity of students in a single classroom. Learning teaching approaches and methods that allow for individual differences is necessary prior to their practicum, where they will encounter and deal with a variety of students.

Second, the participants tended to focus on relatively static features of their students as factors

in individual difference (e.g., likes and dislikes, levels of achievement, and personality). Except for learning styles, most participants did not mention dynamic features. That is, they did not recognize the dynamics of learners' responses to materials or teaching approaches and methods. It is difficult to introduce teaching approaches and methods with diverse situation in English class. However, depriving the context (i.e., students' or schools' characteristics, needs, or conditions) does not contribute to a true understanding of the teaching approaches and methods best used in a teaching career.

Third, they proposed some support ideas for a stepwise or small-step strategy. They focused on S, the student described in detail in the hypothetical case. The final goal of the stepwise activities or tasks was to foster S's speaking skill and to enable S to take part in communication activities. While most participants focused on how to improve S's weakness, some commented on S's classmates, particularly S's partners in communication activities. These participants paid attention to the other students in the hypothetical case, and they were aware of these other students' difficulties or challenges. Recognizing student diversity means recognizing the struggles of all students in English classrooms. In this study, few participants noticed that S's classmates were also struggling with some problems; however, one possible reason for this is that the hypothetical case did not clearly identify which students had difficulties. By considering each student as a person with his or her own background, prospective teachers can give attention to students as individuals rather than seeing only groups of students.

Finally, some of the participants considered the provision of individual support for S to be unfair. We interpreted their definition of *fairness* as the provision of the same material or activity for all students in the same classroom. They seemed anxious about whether providing different materials or activities to some students constituted discrimination. They were also worried whether they diagnosed their students' conditions with disabilities by providing some modifications. *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* declares that all teachers must provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities. Students with diverse backgrounds, for example, students from other countries, students without Japanese proficiency, or students with disabilities often face learning barriers in English classes. When the barrier is derived from a disability, the convention ensures that they can receive support. What if their barrier stems from the other factors? As mentioned in Hyde, Carpenter, and Conway (2010), the main purpose of providing reasonable accommodations is to ensure equal learning outcomes. By the end of the teacher training course, teacher educators need to provide opportunities for prospective teachers to understand and discuss how we should deal with students fairly and equally

5. Conclusion and implications

Mainstream classes include students with diverse educational needs, which sometimes cause students difficulties in learning English without support. The results of this study indicate that prospective teachers in their second year of training had difficulty understanding individual differences. However, this does not mean that teacher educators should avoid teaching individual differences as part of initial teacher education. Rather, they should spend more time teaching the factors that contribute to individual difference. Unless teacher educators clearly describe the classroom settings, when prospective teachers learn teaching approaches or methods, they assume generic elementary, junior high, or high school students according to their interests. Therefore, teacher educators should clearly describe the settings and let prospective teachers use their knowledge of teaching approaches and methods to construct lesson plans. Teacher educators should keep in mind that teaching approaches/methods and learner difference factors interact with each other.

The participants in this study focused mainly on the level of procedure in teaching methods, as most of their modification ideas were about teaching techniques or behaviors. They had neither experienced their practicum nor constructed lesson plans; consequently, it was difficult for them to fully comprehend the objectives of a class, the teacher's role, the students' role, or the construction of a class. This result indicates that teacher educators should take into account the spiral reintroduction of learner difference factors when designing courses for initial English teacher education.

For the further research, we need to spend more time considering how individual differences affect teaching approaches and methods and conduct longitudinal researches to explore how prospective teachers change during their initial teacher education. Their practicum experiences can affect their image of individual differences; therefore, we should compare their views of individual differences before and after their practicum.

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Appendix　創作事例（英語）

　中学校1年生（通常学級）の信吾は，授業の最初の音楽を聞く活動がとても好きであり，リスニングが得意なので英語の授業には自信をもって取り組んでいる。しかし，発言をするのに時間がかかってしまうので，周りの生徒の中には信吾が指名されると発言を待ちきれず「早くしろよ」とつぶやいている生徒もいる。そのため，英語の先生は授業中に信吾を指名することを控えるようになった。

　また，信吾はペアワークなどのコミュニケーション活動が苦手であまりしゃべらず，ペアの相手の生徒が困ってしまったり，イライラしたりしてしまうことがある。信吾は，コミュニケーション活動中は落ち着かないことが多い。1学期に"Do you like〜?"を使って好きなものをお互いに聞く活動をしたとき，学級全体はとても盛り上がったのに対して，信吾は何も答えられず，固まってしまった。ペアの相手をしていた生徒も困ってしまっているのを英語の先生はわかっていたが，「全体を見なければならない」という思いもあり，どのように対応すればよいのかわからなかった。

　現在のような状況が続くと信吾は英語学習に自信をなくしてしまうのではないかと英語の先生は心配している。

設問：
⑴　信吾はどのような子で，何に困っているのでしょうか。さまざまな角度から考えてください。
⑵　信吾が自信をなくすことを防ぐために，今後どのように対応することが必要ですか。具体的に考えてください。